

24th February, 1939.

MEMORANDUM TO:

The Secretary,
Department of Defence,
MELBOURNE, S.C.1. Victoria.

PROPOSALS FOR A NATIONAL REGISTER.

I refer to your memorandum of the 23rd February, 1939, confirming your verbal advice that the recommendations on page 3 of the Cabinet memorandum on the National Register of the 16th February, 1939 were approved by Cabinet.

I am asked:

- "(i) to report on the proposal of the Chairman of the Man Power Committee from the aspect of census principles and methods;
- (ii) to advise on the possibility and advisability of advancing the 1941 Census wholly or in part;
- (iii) to report what would be involved in a census of wealth also along the lines of the War Census. This would be valuable nationally, and a weighty counter-balance to objections against the census of man-power."

I propose to report on these matters in the reverse order.

(iii) Census of Wealth.

It would be practicable to conduct a census of wealth in conjunction with the "census method" of compiling a National Register, along the lines of the inquiry undertaken in 1915. This involved the issue, together with a personal card, of a second card relating to wealth and income. The results of such a wealth census would not be particularly valuable from the point of view of practical use. It would be almost impossible to make any administrative use of the results for the purposes of raising extra taxation or making a capital levy. If any such action were proposed, the machinery of the Taxation Branch would have to be used. Experience showed that there was much evasion and understatement in the War Census returns, even though no actual proposals for extra taxation were associated with it at the time. To secure reliable results it would be necessary to undertake a very comprehensive inquiry, the cost of which would completely outweigh its value.

While the method followed in 1915 would not give very reliable results, it might be of considerable value in reducing any opposition to a compulsory registration of man-power. Much of the criticism of a compulsory register is concerned with objections that no proposals have been made for conscripting wealth in an emergency. From this point of view, the extra cost of issuing two cards instead of one might not be regarded as a serious objection to the proposal.

Unless a compulsory register of man-power is approved, however, I do not think it would be worth while proceeding with the suggested census of wealth. Any partial wealth census would be completely useless from a practical point of view, while it might seriously embarrass the efforts to obtain a voluntary register of man-power.

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man-power. In view of Cabinet's decision against a compulsory register, I have not thought it necessary at this stage to enter into a detailed scheme of organisation of a wealth census.

(ii) The 1941 Census.

After full consideration I wish to advise strongly against the advisability and practicability of advancing the 1941 Census wholly or in part. It would be quite impracticable from a general statistical point of view to advance the Census in part; while, from the same point of view, it would be very unwise to advance the whole Census. The last Census was taken in 1933, two years after the normal date. The Government has already announced its decision to revert to the normal year 1941 for the next Census, which will accord with the practice of all British and many foreign countries. The comparative value of the Census results would be considerably diminished by a further disturbance of the year of collection.

Quite apart from such considerations, however, the proposal is impracticable from the point of view of securing National Register particulars within any reasonably short period. Because of the method of organisation and collection, National Register particulars could not be obtained until after the whole of the Census information had been collected, coded, and punched on to machine cards. This preliminary work could not, even with almost superhuman efforts, be completed under 18 months; and even this would be contingent on a doubling of the proposed Census staff and machinery.

Further serious difficulties would be -

1. The desired information would be obtained only in part unless supplementary questionnaires were used. This could be done now just as well as, and certainly more quickly than, in conjunction with the population Census.

2. Particulars of individuals would not be available on separate cards for filing in a Register. Census information is collected on large schedules containing many names, and including men, women and children.

3. Individual names could not be disclosed unless the Government approved the principle of a compulsory Register, and amended the Census and Statistics Act to enable individual particulars to be revealed.

4. As we would presumably wish to revert to the year 1951 for the following Census, the proposal would mean another gap of 12 years between two censuses. It is unfortunately too late to consider the present proposal in connection with a plan for quinquennial censuses.

I have no hesitation, therefore, in advising strongly against any such proposal.

(i) Compilation of a Voluntary National Register.

The following remarks may exceed the terms of reference in some respects, but I have found it impossible to report adequately on the proposals of the Chairman of the Man Power Committee without some preliminary consideration of the objects and requirements of a National Register.

The Objects of a National Register.

Two main objects could be served by the compilation of a National Register -

I. An assessment of the skilled labour and man-power resources of the country, in order (i) to throw light on the adequacy or inadequacy of existing resources, (ii) to allow time for action to train categories of labour found to be deficient, and (iii) to facilitate allocation of man-power resources in time of emergency.

II. Collection of particulars relating to persons willing to volunteer for emergency auxiliary services, e.g. fire-fighting, decontamination work, ambulance and first-aid work, etc.

The second object (II) is the one to which the British National Register is chiefly devoted, and this for two reasons. In the first place, the greater danger of Air Raids makes the question of emergency auxiliary services much more urgent in Britain than in Australia; while, secondly, there is no doubt at all that British resources in skilled labour are more than adequate to the likely demand for them. In the latter respect the British problem is one of allocation rather than assessment, and it has apparently been decided that the publication of a list of "reserved occupations" is all that is necessary at present.

The first object (I) is the more urgent in Australia, and, while there is some need for the second object (II), the latter could be quite easily served by measures much less comprehensive than the compilation of a National Register.

Emergency Auxiliary Services.

The suggestion is made at once that primary responsibility for the organisation of these services should be delegated to the States, Commonwealth participation being restricted to (i) the provision of technical advice on matters of which the Defence Department has special knowledge, (ii) (possibly) financial assistance in providing some types of specialised equipment, e.g. gas-masks, first-aid supplies, standardised handbooks and instructions, and (iii) handing over to the appropriate authorities particulars of prospective volunteers which may come into possession of the Commonwealth as part of, or incidental to, any form of National Register which may be established.

The States are in a much better position to organise this class of work than the Commonwealth, as most of the "normal" services of this kind are already operated by or under the authority of the State Governments. Overlapping would also be avoided, particularly in New South Wales, where considerable organisation of this kind has already been commenced; while it would help to keep the States occupied on useful work to the possible exclusion of more grandiose schemes of "State" defence. A further merit of this proposal is the opportunity given for diverting the flood of well-meaning women from the Defence Department to the State organisations.

The Requirements of a National Register in Australia.

A. Technical Requirements.

These are concerned on the one hand with the demand for skilled labour in industries and defence services of varying

degrees of urgency; and, on the other, with the present and potential supply of labour to fill those demands. The labour demand for the most essential industries is much easier to ascertain than the available supply of workers, who are at present spread through a wide range of industries and employments, working on their own account, or unemployed.

These technical requirements of a National Register are listed below in the order of importance that I would assign to them:

Very Urgent.

1. The demand for skilled labour, according to individual crafts and occupations, in Government and private factories and annexes responsible for the production of munitions and war stores. (Ascertainable by direct inquiry).
2. The demand for skilled labour in private factories and other industrial establishments producing or processing essential materials for use in munition factories and for the most urgent needs of the civil population. (Ascertainable by direct inquiry and questionnaire).
3. The supply of skilled labour available for (1) munitions factories and annexes, and (2) other factories and establishments producing for urgent needs; and the sources from which such labour could be rapidly drawn in the event of emergency. (Ascertainable with fair success by questionnaire from an extensive range of employers - employers only to be listed by name).

Urgent.

4. The demand for skilled labour in all factories, industrial establishments and public utilities whose activities would require to be maintained or expanded in the event of prolonged hostilities. The nature of these establishments is being investigated by the Industrial Panel and the Financial and Economic Committee. (Ascertainable by a more extensive questionnaire to employers).
5. The supply of skilled labour available for the establishments mentioned in (4); and the sources from which such labour could be drawn. (Ascertainable with an uncertain degree of success by questionnaire from the whole range of employers in an extensive range of industries. The inquiry into demand and supply would be undertaken in the same questionnaire. Employers only would be listed by name as the "source" of supply.)

Desirable.

6. The names and addresses of the skilled labour supply mentioned in (3) above. (Could probably be ascertained privately from certain employers, but this would savour of an underhand method of a "compulsory" register, and might be objectionable politically).
7. A complete assessment of the skilled labour available for the establishments mentioned in (4) above. (Ascertainable only by a compulsory "census", which would include small

establishments in all industries, people working on own account, and those at present unemployed).

8. The names and addresses of the skilled labour supply mentioned in (7) above, together with particulars about alternative occupations, i.e. special skill or training additional to that necessary in present occupation. (Ascertainable only by a compulsory "census" and compulsory "registration").

Supplementary.

9. Bulk analyses of the total male population by age, occupation, marital status, fitness, dependants, nationality, etc. (Ascertainable only by a compulsory "census"; compulsory "registration" not required).

10. The names, addresses and some particulars of volunteers for specified emergency auxiliary services. (Ascertainable adequately by voluntary effort, with or without the collection of personal cards by a centralised organisation).

B. Administrative Requirements.

If any kind of Register aiming at comprehensive results is to be proceeded with on a voluntary basis, it is essential to reckon with (a) the probability of partial failure, and (b) the possibility of events ultimately forcing a decision in favour of a compulsory Register.

For these reasons it would be a matter of mere financial prudence to design the "voluntary" organisation in such a way that the partial results obtained would not be entirely wasted in the event of failure. Hence the "voluntary" scheme should be so designed that a "compulsory" scheme could be readily grafted on to it at a later stage, if and when this appeared necessary. It should also be such as to afford the necessary training and practice to the personnel which might eventually have to compile a "compulsory" Register.

C. Political Requirements.

Certain considerations which may be regarded as more or less of a political character are suggested for consideration:

1. Compulsion versus Free Will. A wide distinction can be drawn between the compulsory provision of information (e.g. census returns, statistical and taxation returns, etc.) and compulsory registration. The former implies a counting of anonymous units according to their characteristics; the latter involves the counting and recording of the units as named individuals. There can be no political objection to the former; there may be (and Cabinet has presumably decided there would be) political objection to the latter. If Cabinet has not already decided against the former it would still be open to consider a scheme such as that recommended in the Blamey-Shedden-Wilson Report providing for compulsory returns but voluntary registration. This would be less valuable than a completely compulsory system, but much more valuable than a completely voluntary system.

2. The Need for Spectacular Action. In view of the Government's announced intention to proceed with a National Register, and current popular conceptions of the nature of such a Register, there is some question whether the Government can afford not to do something which will appeal to the imagination of the public and the press. It might be suggested that, irrespective of any practical value attaching to the results obtained, the psychological effect of a large-scale appeal to the individual could be of considerable value in bringing home to the people the urgency of the national defence question. Moreover, irrespective of the decision reached on National Insurance on March 1st, the need for a diversion on or about that date is clearly apparent. Hence something in the way of an authoritative announcement on the National Register should be ready.

3. An Outlet for Voluntary Effort. If a voluntary scheme is proceeded with, the organisation should, if possible, provide some outlet for the activities of the Defence Leagues and other organisations which are even now straining at the leash. On the other hand, the association of such bodies with the detailed answers to questionnaires should be reduced to the limit.

Methods of Establishing a National Register.

The method to be adopted obviously depends on the object of the Register, and the extent to which it is desired to secure full coverage within the field chosen for inquiry. The more practicable proposals are listed below, with brief comments on their relative merits.

Alternative I. The compulsory "census method" recommended in the Blamey-Shedden-Wilson Report.

This was directed towards fulfilling "technical requirements" 7, 8 and 9. The information for numbers 1, 2, 4 and 10 would have been obtained by other methods. The chief advantages are the full coverage obtained, the relatively low cost, and the spectacular appeal.

Cabinet has decided against this method, which is not further considered.

Alternative II. The voluntary method recommended in the Blamey Report of 14th February.

The method suggested in this report would no doubt be practicable, and the plans have been carefully worked out. It is noteworthy, however, that the author of the proposals himself draws attention to the following drawbacks:

1. The undertaking would be a "garguantuan" one involving tremendous problems of organisation.
2. The cost would be very high, and very considerably higher than under the compulsory method. "Without the employment of the necessary personnel to implement the scheme, there is serious danger of a breakdown."
3. The time required to collect the cards would be much greater than under the compulsory method. It is estimated that 7,000 voluntary helpers would be required, spread throughout the Commonwealth.

4. The coverage would almost certainly fall far short of a reasonable proportion of the population.

To these drawbacks the following may be added:

5. The availability of the personal particulars on the cards to the army of voluntary helpers, both during and after collection would probably be resented by the public. This view is strengthened by actual experience during the taking of population censuses, and criticisms which have been raised in Great Britain.
6. A request for the filling-in of one card might succeed, but a request for cards in duplicate would produce a good deal of exasperation and refusal to co-operate.
7. The Register might be swamped with cards from well-meaning but relatively useless people who wished to volunteer for auxiliary services; while the number of skilled labourers returning cards would probably be relatively small.
8. The organisation could not be swung over in an emergency to a compulsory basis, should this eventually prove essential.
9. Much of the time and cost of the voluntary effort would be dissipated on the initial and subsequent organisation of the volunteers for auxiliary services.
10. Many heads of local governing authorities have strong political views, and it would not be possible to rely in all cases on their full co-operation in establishing and operating the machinery required.
11. The proposals for subsequent utilisation of the cards seem to call for a far greater degree of decentralisation than would be either necessary or efficient.

Alternative III. The "Census method" recommended in the Blamey-Shedden-Wilson Report made compulsory as to supplying information, but voluntary as to registration.

This would supply complete coverage as to numbers and partial coverage as to names. People supplying cards would indicate thereon whether they agreed to having their names put on the Register. (In effect they would be casting a vote, and the scheme might even be extended to form both a popular vote on the question of compulsory registration, and registration itself in the event of an affirmative vote). At the same time, a publicity campaign would be required, in order to convince people of the undoubted advantages to themselves of being on the Register.

Questionnaires to employers to ascertain the demand for skilled labour in essential industries (see "technical requirement" no. 4) would be undertaken in addition to the general census of labour.

The emphasis that would be placed on the "occupational questions" would afford valuable experience and training to a key staff to be subsequently used on the 1941 Census. This task was tackled for the first time in the 1933 Census, and the results were not entirely satisfactory.

Alternative IV. The "census method" recommended in the Blamey-Shedden-Wilson Report, but without any legislative obligation to obtain and supply a card.

(a) Cards to be made available at Post Offices and other centres, and field canvassers not to be employed.

This would have some element of public appeal, but very little. It is possible that few people would actually go to the Post Offices to collect the cards, and the Government might be accused of lack of interest.

(b) Cards to be posted to every male person on the electoral rolls, the work of addressing envelopes to be undertaken by voluntary organisations such as the Women's organisations and the Defence Leagues.

This would have a much wider element of public appeal, and the Government could claim that it had made every effort to make the voluntary appeal successful. The most laborious part of the initial work would be the addressing of envelopes, and this would form a very suitable opportunity for utilising the services of those voluntary organisations which are so anxious to assist in this matter. The cards would be returned by post to the central authority, so the voluntary workers would not be in a position either to canvass personally or to see the particulars contained on the completed cards.

Supplies of cards could also be furnished to Post Offices and large establishments for distribution on application.

By posting cards to male electors only, the Register authorities would no doubt escape part of the avalanche of cards that might otherwise be expected from women and girls for whom no useful outlet can be found.

Questionnaires to employers to ascertain the demand for skilled labour in essential industries (see "technical requirement" no. 4) would be undertaken in addition to the individual card inquiry, as under Alternative III.

Organisation for Subsequent Use of the Information.

This can only be determined satisfactorily after Cabinet has made a decision as to the general nature and scope of the Register. If Alternative III or Alternative IV is chosen a somewhat similar procedure to that outlined in the Blamey-Shedden-Wilson Report would be followed.

Registration of Women.

This is dealt with satisfactorily in the Blamey Report. I would suggest, however, that the registration of female industrial and professional workers should be actively encouraged, and the cards dealt with in the same way as the cards received from men. Other classes of women should be invited to register only if they are prepared to volunteer for personal service.

The cards from "female volunteers" could either be handed over to the States directly, or dealt with by the Australian

Defence Leagues as suggested in the Blamey Report.

Guide Book.

The labour census aspect could be dealt with satisfactorily in the initial stages by "instructions" to be issued with the cards. If any guide-book is issued, however, it would be an advantage to include therein a list of occupations somewhat similar to the "reserved occupations" listed in Great Britain.

It would be of considerable value to issue a guide-book for the guidance of prospective volunteers, who are at present being seriously misled by the well-meaning efforts of all sorts of voluntary bodies. State officers concerned with the organisation of auxiliary services should be consulted when the book is being compiled. The State organisation of the National Insurance Commission might be co-opted temporarily to assist in this work.

Such a book would not need to be distributed universally, but chiefly to Post Offices, field staffs, voluntary organisations, trade unions, etc.

Administration of the Survey.

- (i) Collection of Data. If the Blamey Report is adopted, the Man Power Committee should be given the responsibility of collecting the cards.

If either Alternatives I or III is adopted the Commonwealth Statistician and the Man Power Committee should co-operate in the work, and the services of the National Insurance Commission staff should be utilised as far as they are available and suitable for the tasks involved.

- (ii) Classification and Tabulation. This can be undertaken most efficiently by the Commonwealth Statistician, whichever alternative is adopted.

- (iii) Subsequent Use of Data. This would be a matter for arrangement between the Commonwealth Statistician and the Man Power Committee. The results, or such of them as are of interest, should also be made available to the several "national planning" committees at present working in co-operation with the Defence Department.

- (iv) Staff. Depending on the decision on National Insurance, the demand for temporary staff should be met as far as possible by utilising the services of unattached officers of the National Insurance Commission. Further, preference should be given in employment to persons whose experience and training could be utilised in connection with the 1941 population census.

- (v) Suggestion for an Organising Committee. In view of the probable inter-departmental character of the organisation required, it is suggested that a National Register Committee be set up -

- (a) To consist of the
 - (Chairman of the Man Power Committee
 - (Commonwealth Statistician
 - (Secretary, Department of Defence
 - (Chairman, National Insurance
 - (Commission

(b) With power to co-opt (the Chief Electoral Officer
(Representatives of "national
(planning" committees

Sample Register Card.

To give some idea of the kind of particulars that could be collected and readily handled, the attached rough draft is included. It would require further consideration and re-arrangement in certain particulars before being finally adopted. It has been designed to afford the minimum of essential information and to facilitate filing, coding and the subsequent machine processes involved in classification and tabulation.

Summary of Recommendations.

1. The taking of a census of wealth should be seriously considered if a compulsory National Register is compiled, but not otherwise.
2. The results of such a census would have little value in themselves, but would help to make a compulsory Register more acceptable. The extra cost would not be substantial in comparison with the total cost of the Register.
3. It would be inadvisable for statistical reasons to attempt to advance the date of the 1941 Census.

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4. It would be impracticable to obtain all the necessary particulars for a National Register from the Census schedules, and it would be impossible to obtain any useful information within a reasonably short period.
5. Use of the Census schedules would require legislative action involving the compulsory principle.
6. Alternative III (p. 7) is strongly recommended for further consideration.
7. Failing approval of Alternative III, Alternative IV(b) (p. 8) is recommended as the most suitable method after taking all the circumstances into account.
8. Primary responsibility for the organisation of emergency auxiliary services should be delegated to the State Governments.
9. A suitable general guide to volunteer activities and a list of essential occupations should be compiled and published immediately.
10. Only female industrial and professional workers should be included in the main Register. Volunteers for emergency services should be handed on to State organisations, or registered by the women's sections of the Defence Leagues.